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COMMENTARY

## Irrelevance of Legislature woefully clear



By **Rod Watson**

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Updated: December 16, 2010, 7:36 AM

Can we have a do-over? It's clear now that last month's referendum to reduce the 15-member Erie County Legislature by more than a quarter was the wrong way to go.

The problem isn't that we'll have four fewer legislators. The problem is that we'll still have 11 too many.

We should end the charade of checks and balances by a Legislature that has become a wholly owned subsidiary of County Executive Chris Collins. In the process, it has become complicit in dismantling the social contract that government is supposed to protect.

The GOP deal to partly fund libraries and cultural groups saves face for them and Collins, but reduces vital economic engines and quality-of-life enhancers to mere frills, making the cultural charity cases even more dependent on the kindness of strangers at local foundations.

The money those foundations could use to improve the community in other ways will now be siphoned off to do what government should be doing, resulting in a net loss for Western New York.

That shell game would have been unnecessary had Legislature Republicans had the guts to stand by their own votes.

“There would not have been a tax increase,” said County Comptroller Mark C. Poloncarz, who released an analysis of the budget that lawmakers originally passed.

But still they capitulated in Collins’ 154 vetoes, gutting the County Comptroller’s Office in the process. That will necessitate more court fights and may prompt the control board to reassert itself as the only oversight body left on a county executive who hates oversight.

And what of nominal Legislature Chairwoman Barbara Miller-Williams, a Democrat who got the title by cozying up to the Republican Collins, only to see her own party ignore her when crafting its budget and the other party ignore her when forging its agreement?

When you sell your soul in a deal with the devil, there is only one place you can end up. It must be a living hell to stand there wielding a gavel knowing you’ve been rendered irrelevant by both sides.

But the entire body has become irrelevant, as Collins proved again that he’ll use any tactic, no matter how dishonest, to consolidate power.

Was he lying earlier when he said there was no money to fund the libraries and smaller cultural next year without a tax hike?

Or was he lying Tuesday when he said there’s suddenly at least \$3.1 million to fund such entities, as long as that funding helps him stash the six Republicans — enough to effectively control the Legislature — in his back pocket?

Of course, the biggest lie of all remains the original one: that he is not a politician, even as he hoards a surplus to run for re-election on.

He used every political cliché available in “robo” phone calls decrying “special interests,” “pork-barrel spending” and the Legislature’s “career politicians.” He told voters again that there was no money to improve the budget without “increasing your property taxes.”

Before you could even hang up the phone, he had flip-flopped with Tuesday’s budget deal — just like a politician.

But it was GOP lawmakers who abetted the whole charade.

Evolution is supposed to rid us of useless appendages, but it is much too slow a process. That's why we still have little fingers on each hand — and still have the County Legislature.

Just move them into the Rath Building next to Collins, create a Department of Do-nothingness, and close the door. The Legislature chamber and its trappings would still exist, but at least we wouldn't have to fill it with warm bodies lacking enough spine.

Sure, we'll still be left with a surplus of desks and chairs.

But empty seats or empty suits, what's the difference?

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## Comments

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**SORT:** **NEWEST FIRST** | OLDEST FIRST

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Maybe they should all go to Maryland and represent us from there. While I don't go to all the cultural, unless they say "Erie County" in front of them they should be like any other business. If you don't make money you close. I wish the government would give my business money. We are becoming a society that rewards failure in every aspect. That's what the Democrats and Obamacare want. Total reliance on the government.

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**FRANK DADDARIO, AKRON, NY** on Sun Dec 19, 2010 at 07:38 AM

FLAG AS INAPPROPRIATE

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"Every penny of property tax currently goes to pay the county's Medicare bill. How much more of a "social contract" does Watson want the county to provide? The answer's pretty clear with the majority of columns he writes (which, along ... "

No problem, David. I wonder if "the people" who are now paying buckets for Albany mandates most of which goes to New York City are going to feel when Obamacare rapes them of what they have left. It's basically adding 20M people onto the Medicaid rolls at the expense of Medicare which goes to people who have PAID INTO the system their entire working lives. Scary!

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**PEGGY JENNINGS, DEPEW, NY** on Fri Dec 17, 2010 at 11:47 AM

FLAG AS INAPPROPRIATE